

INTERIOR SECTIONAL VIEW OF THE REMAINS OF THE COLISEUM, AT ROME.



The mighty Coliseum now comes under our consideration. Notwithstanding nearly half of its walls have been destroyed for the sake of erecting other buildings,* it still presents to view one of the most magnificent and interesting ruins of antiquity:—

"A ruin, yet what ruin! from its mass
Walls, palaces, half-cities, have been rear'd;
Yet oft the enormous skeleton ye pass,
And marvel where the spoil could have appeared.

Hath it indeed been plunder'd, or but clear'd?"

CHILDS HAROLD, C. iv. S. 143.

This immense edifice, called sometimes Colosseum from its vastness, (or from an enormous figure of Nero placed on or near the site, and which was 120 feet high,) was commenced by the Emperor Flavius Vespasian, (and from that circumstance it is frequently spoken of as the *Flavian amphitheatre*), and finished by his son Titus about A.D. 79 or 80. It was built over the marshes of Nero, as appears from the lines of Martial (Epig. 2):

"Hic ubi conspiciat venerabilis amphitheatris
erigitur moles,
Stagna Neronis erant."

But it was built from a part only of the materials of Nero's Golden House, which was demolished by Vespasian as being too splendid even for an emperor.

This amphitheatre is of an oval form, one diameter (the conjugate) being 620 feet, and the other (the transverse) 513 feet; the height is 157 feet, it is nearly 1,800 feet in circumference, and occupies a space of about six acres; the longer diameter of the arena is 287 feet, and the shorter is 180 feet. The external wall is decorated with four orders of Roman architecture, the Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite, rising one above the other, with arches in the three lower stories to the number of eighty in each tier, between the columns which are engaged; the arches of the second and third stories were originally filled with statues:—

"Arches on arches! as it were that Rome,
Collecting the chief trophies of her line,
Would build up all her triumphs in one dome,
Her Coliseum stands."

CHILDS HAROLD, C. iv. S. 128.

* The *Farnese Palace*, built for the nephews of Pope Paul III., from the design of Michael Angelo, was erected from the travertine stone taken from the Coliseum, and so was the Palace of the Cancellaria from Bramante's design; and the Palace of Saint Mark was supplied from the same noble quarry. Pope Benedict XIV. checked the plan of spoliation by covering altars around, and a cross in the centre, and consecrating it out of respect to the blood of the Christian martyrs who perished in its arena during the persecutions.

On the occasion of dedicating this vast amphitheatre, which could contain 109,000 spectators, Titus exhibited shows to the people for 100 days, 5,000 wild beasts were slaughtered during this period by fifty in a day (Suetonius), and battles on foot and in boats were represented by gladiators. (D. Cassius.)

This mighty fabric has no parallel in the world for size and immensity; even the huge Pyramids of Egypt cannot compare with it, for they diminish at once from their base to nearly a point, whereas the Coliseum rises perpendicularly for 157 feet 6 inches. According to an early writer, it was finished in two years and nine months, "*Biennio post ac menses novem amphitheatris perfectum opere.*" (Victor.) Well, therefore, might the Roman poet exultingly declare that every other labour must yield to that of the Imperial amphitheatre:—

"Omnis Cæsareo cedat labor amphitheatro!"
(MARTIAL.)

and from the time of its erection down to the present day it has been looked upon as one of the greatest marvels of art, and has furnished for centuries an exhaustless theme alike for the rapture of the antiquary, the pencil of the artist, or the glowing description of the poet. But in contemplating the structure we can never lose sight of the inhuman purposes to which it was devoted; the recollection of the blood of men, of Christians, slaughtered to make a Roman holiday, must always be associated with the aspect of

—"those scarce mortal arches,"

Pile above pile of everlasting wall!
The theatre, where emperors and their subjects
(Those subjects Romans) stood at gaze upon
The battles of the monarchs of the wild
And wood, the lion and his tasky rebels
Of the then untam'd desert, brought to joust
In the arena, (as right well they might
When they had left no human foe unconquer'd,)
Made even the forest pay its tribute of
Life to their amphitheatre, as well
As Dacia men to die the eternal death
For a sole instant's pastime, and 'pass on
To a new Gladiator."

LOUIS BYRON'S DEFORMED TRANSFORMED.

The practice of giving shows to the public, in which wild beasts were engaged with each other or with men, and those men Christians,* and the gladiatorial fights between single com-

battants or in large numbers, was continued by the emperors until the year 404 A.D., when an Eastern monk, Almachius, or Telemachus, (and under the latter name he was sainted,) rushing into the arena to separate the combatants, was slain, and the inhuman shows were abolished by Honorius. But it ought to be remembered that a Christian poet, Procopius, had previously exhorted Honorius to put an end to this dreadful sport,

"Where man was slaughtered by his fellow-man."

The space devoted to the arena was an ellipsis whose longer diameter was 287 feet, and the shorter 180 feet; the remainder of the immense inclosure was occupied by the seats rising in range above range, disposed in the most admirable manner for every one to see (hence such buildings were called *visoria*), and accessible by corridors and passages communicating with staircases, arranged with such consummate skill that the immense numbers of citizens could find their allotted stations easily and without delay.

The lowest seats, on the podium, which were of marble, were the most honourable, being reserved for the emperor, senators, ambassadors, magistrates, and persons of the highest distinction; above these to the top of the second story, the seats, also of marble, were occupied by the knights (equites) according to their rank, the civil and military tribunes; in the upper rows were persons of inferior rank; and the common people filled the highest seats of all, which answered to the galleries of modern theatres, and placed at some distance above the rest. To protect the spectators from the heat or rain, the whole of the immense circle was at times covered by an awning (velarium) stretched from 240 masts or poles which were placed on the outside of the upper story, passing through the cornice, and resting upon corbels. This awning was commonly of woollen cloth, and sometimes of silk; on one occasion Nero caused a purple velarium to be extended across a theatre, representing the heavens, with stars of gold, and his image in the centre, seated in a car, in imitation of the sun.

The Coliseum suffered frequently from lightning; and when the Christian faith was established, on the downfall of paganism, the sports of the arena were discontinued, and, as a consequence, the building itself being neglected, fell into decay. In the year 1084, Guiscard, the Norman, pulled down one half of the Coliseum, lest it should be used against him as a citadel; to which purpose it was actually

* Many learned commentators, as Drs. Whitby and MacKnight and Schreusner, consider that the words of St. Paul, 1 Corinthians, xv. 32, refer to an actual combat in which he was engaged with beasts at Ephesus.